The new Fish Facility Coordination component will share many of the structural, coordination, and oversight features of the existing Ecological Studies and Monitoring component, except that the Fish Facilities Coordination and Review Team will not directly manage programs, studies, and projects. Instead they will provide coordination, oversight, policy development, and interagency review. Existing interagency fish facility committees, programs, units, and projects will be similar to project work teams under the existing IEP structure but will maintain their autonomy. They will be encouraged to pass information to a member of a new "Fish Facilities Coordination and Review Team" representing their lead agency, so that all agencies can be better coordinated for increased effectiveness with the limited funds available for fish facilities work. The IEP Directors intend that the Fish Facilities Coordination and Review Team function as a clearinghouse for interagency review of new programs and proposals, so that the funding agency can be assured that proposals have received interagency review and, if possible, been revised to gain unanimous interagency support.

Summer Tow-Net Survey

Lee Miller

The 1997 summer tow-net abundance index for striped bass is 1.6, the lowest annual index measured in the bay/delta. The previous low index was 2.1, measured in 1996. This year's index also falls well below the average index of 66.6 for 1959-1976 and below the average index of 17.4 for 1977-1996. Thus, the general trend of low abundance indices since 1977 continues.

The final abundance indices were 0.6 for the Suisun area and 1.0 for the delta area, reflecting a higher concentration of striped bass in the delta, particularly in the lower San Joaquin River. Although 1997 was a wet year, this distribution is typical of a dry year, in which optimal nursery habitat is in the upstream portion of the estuary. The dry year distribution is probably due to the extremely dry February-June period.

The first tow-net survey began June 27, a day later than scheduled due to a cracked oil pan on the *Striper II*. Both surveys were conducted using the *Scrutiny*, a boat borrowed from DWR. Striped bass were large on the first survey, with a mean length of 33.4 mm, suggesting they spawned early or grew fast due to higher-than-average spring temperatures.

Fall Midwater Trawl Survey

Lee Miller

Four monthly surveys are scheduled for the 1997 Fall Midwater Trawl Survey. The September survey was completed on the 18th, with a total of 235 striped bass sampled. The abundance index was 286, the highest September index since 1993, when the index was 506, and was almost four times the record low of 71 set in 1996. Typically, the tow-net and fall midwater trawl abundance indices are correlated, but the summer tow-net index was a record low and the September midwater trawl index was only the 10th lowest of record. However, this year's index is still relatively low considering the highest index was 12,111 in 1967.

Coordinators' Strategy Meeting

Randall Brown

On July 30 and 31, the Interagency Coordinators, Pat Coulston, Leo Winternitz, and Steve Ford met to discuss ways to improve the program as well as future directions. We also reviewed responses to questions about program scope and direction. A key discussion item was the Program's potential role in CALFED. A few action items from the retreat were:

- Enhance the role of the Management Team (see article this issue) and increase effectiveness of the project work teams.
- Make better use of the Scientific and Management advisory groups.
- Enhance communications with those who use IEP data and information.
- Continue discussions with CALFED management of the Interagency Program's role in the bay/delta and the watershed.
- Make strategic (*ie*, long term) planning an integral program component.

The coordinators conceptually agreed that the Interagency Program should not be limited to the bay/delta or to its existing technical components. (A holistic, ecosystem approach may require expansion into the watershed and inclusion of additional technical disciplines.) We also agreed to consider new organizational structures.

The challenge will be to follow through with the action items developed at the meeting. Everyone, from the coordinators to project work team members, is far too busy. Almost without exception, folks working in the Interagency Program are pulled several directions by competing demands for their time. Long-term improvement will require more staff dedicated to the program and more time from existing staff and management.

Delta Smelt Concerns Result in Changes in SWP/CVP Operations

Zachary Hymanson and Dale Sweetnam

State and federal export facility operations were modified in late May and early June in response to concerns over the distribution and high take of delta smelt. Since we have no direct measure of delta smelt losses at these facilities, we use salvage of delta smelt as surrogate for "take". Despite 1997 being an above-normal water year, this spring was the driest on record for central California (Figure 1). Consequently, the distribution of young-of-the-year delta smelt was more typical of dry year hydrology, with a greater proportion of the population remaining in the delta through spring and summer. This year was also unique due to a greater proportion of delta smelt spawning in the central delta than has been observed over the last several years. Delta smelt spawn in areas of fresh water under tidal influence. In dryer years, they generally spawn in the Cache Slough area; in wetter years spawning is widespread and can occur as far west as the Napa River. Therefore, this year's scenario of a large portion of the delta smelt population spawning directly in front of the export facilities and the lack of outflow to move delta smelt westward toward Suisun Bay elevated concerns to a high level.

The FWS biological opinion dealing with the effects of SWP/CVP operations on delta smelt uses various levels of combined SWP/CVP delta smelt salvage as triggers to initiate actions to reduce water project impacts on delta smelt. These thresholds include:

- The 14-day running average of combined delta smelt salvage, commonly referred to as the yellow-light level; and
- The cumulative total of combined salvage for each month, commonly referred to as the red-light level.

The red-light level is based on historical salvage data and varies among months and among water year types. For example, in an above-normal water year (like 1997) the red-light level ranges from 733 fish in December to 11,990 fish in October. Monthly red-light levels for below-normal water years are generally higher than for above-normal water years.

In 1997, the combined CVP/SWP delta smelt salvage increased dramatically during May as young-of-the-year delta smelt grew large enough to be salvaged. Only delta smelt longer than 20 millimeters are considered to be "take" in the salvage operations. The yellow-light level was exceeded by May 12, and the red-light level (9,769 delta smelt) was exceeded by May 16 (Figure 2). Combined salvage remained high throughout the month, and by the end of May total monthly salvage (31,686 delta smelt) exceeded the red-light level more than threefold.

Several actions were proposed and implemented as a result of discussions within the CALFED Operations Group, the No-Name Group, and the Delta Smelt Work Group. These actions included:

- Holding project exports at 2,250 cfs and delaying export ramp-up until the end of May;
- Early removal of the temporary barrier at the head of Old River; and
- Opening the Delta Cross Channel gates.

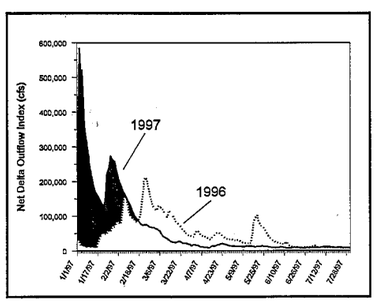

Figure 1
NET DELTA OUTFLOW INDEX,
JANUARY-JULY 1996 AND 1997

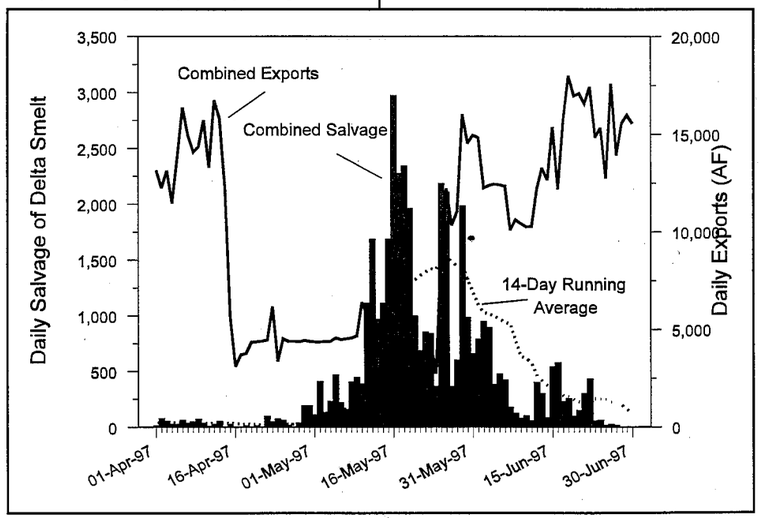

Figure 2
CVP/SWP DELTA SMELT SALVAGE, APRIL-JUNE 1997
Bars represent combined daily salvage of delta smelt.
Solid line represents combined daily exports, in acre-feet.
Dashed line represents the 14-day running average of delta smelt.7